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### A Return to the Authentic: The Changing Book Industry & Millennial Detachment

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A Return To The Authentic: The Changing Book Industry & Millennial Detachment

By

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A Thesis Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements of the Honors Program at Assumption College

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## Introduction

*I love the book. I love the feel of a book in my hands, the compactness of it, the shape, the size. I love the feel of paper. The sound it makes when I turn a page. I love the beauty of print on paper, the patterns, the shapes, the fonts. I am astonished by the versatility and practicality of The Book. It is so simple. It is so fit for its purpose. It may give me mere content, but no e-reader will ever give me that sort of added pleasure. –Susan Hill*

Growing up, books were my first love. Some children liked to play house, others went outside; I read. This passion followed me through my childhood and teen years up to today. Countless nights would pass without much sleep because I couldn't stop reading, my voracious appetite never fully quenched. Susan Hill hits the nail on the head with her description of the draw of books, each page leading to a new part of the personal world you have created through the story in your mind. Yet this experience may soon be just a distant memory in the minds of those who love to read. Just like most other industries in today's world, the book industry is following the technological trend. The rise of the eBook has begun to dominate. Consumers are shying away from buying print books in favor of the more convenient and disposable electronic version. No longer do we care about the personal, mental, or emotional connection that we form when we immerse ourselves into the pages of a story, or the escape that it creates. We have started to choose the screen over the paper, the disposable over the pride of ownership. Reading books calls for an attachment, for having a stake in something bigger than yourself. Yet our connection to screens, now invading the book industry, has caused a disconnect from passion and attachment with ourselves and others.

Technology is around us at all times, at work on computers, at home on cell phones, and now infiltrating the world of books. Reading a story through eBooks in turn becomes too similar to every other daily activity; the unique experience is lost. In the world of technology, this, however, is an all too common reality to Gen Y, or the millennial generation. Those born between the 1980s and early 2000s, considered the millennials, have been wrapped up in the technological advancement of the world for their entire lives; to them there is no world without technology. Similar to how technology causes a disconnect in the book industry for readers, the bigger picture illustrates a larger problem within this generation as a whole. Millennials have formed patterns of lack of ownership, also known as ownership culture, and detachment, in almost all aspects of their lives, from buying cars and houses, to book ownership, to relationships. There are many speculative reasons for this, ranging from growing up in a time of an unstable economy, violence, or inequality. However, these reasons do not reach into the deeper issue, that of relational detachment. Due to the over-connected disconnected world, millennials no longer form personal and meaningful connections with those around them, causing a severe lack of trust.

The lack of connection does not just apply personally, however. It reaches much farther into connection with material goods as well. Millennials, unlike most generations before them, are moving from seeing success as material to seeing it as emotional. Experiences rather than items hold the utmost importance for the millennial generation. Millennials look for meaning through what they do in their lives, how much they have lived and what they have accomplished. To millennials, there is a strong correlation between finding one's meaning and being happy. Humans are social creatures, so in order to achieve meaning, there must be a connection to others; meaning is not a solitary accomplishment. Therefore, it must mean that in order to

achieve true happiness for the millennial generation, connection must be involved. This presents a problem for the generation that is so afraid of attachment. How can a generation that strays from connection ever find true happiness?

One answer may be found in returning to an authentic, classical lifestyle. An authentic life is one filled with connection and truth, what is natural to humans. Plato, along with Jean Baudrillard, a 20th century French thinker, spend much of their theories focusing on this idea of what is true and authentic, where the real exists. These ideas are prominent in the discussion of this problem.

Research has been done in regards to technology's effect, and even more specifically eBook's effect, on physical health as well as learning. Furthermore, research has been conducted in regards to the change in ownership culture within family units, as well as on millennial detachment in relationships, material items, and how these changes will affect businesses in the future.

What I aim to add to the conversation in short is to look at the current changes plaguing the book publishing industry, and connect this to the social and emotional detachment common in the millennial generation. This will be expanded to include the quest to return to an authentic, classical life, and what this really means through the lens of books and stories. Ideas of philosophers like Baudrillard and Plato on topics such as the tangible versus the image will help to deepen this concept.

Our way of life is changing, and at a faster pace than many would like to admit. Technology controls our lives, and it is slowly seeping into every possible industry. A previous

form of escape is now becoming entangled in this world. The experience of reading a book may soon be no different from reading a text message from a friend, images trapped by a screen. Yet this seems to be a direction that the millennial generation is comfortable moving in. A severe lack of attachment and connection, personally and materially, is the easier way to live. However, the question remains, maybe millennials have it right. Is returning to an authentic type of life the way to find happiness, or is detachment the right way to go? Maybe life *is* more fulfilling when bursting with experiences rather than material items. And who is to say that detachment is a totally new problem? Maybe it is something that has always existed but the millennial generation is only continuing the trend in a different way. These are persistent concerns that impact us in the year 2016. Are these lifestyle changes a common occurrence that have always been around that just happen over time, or is the millennial generation the one that will change the face of the world forever? My work will contribute new questions, and possibly answers, to pressing questions for our world today and moving into the future regarding happiness, authenticity, and truth.

## **Part One**

### The Book Industry



## Chapter 1

### The Art of the Book

*Reading an old-fashioned paper book might seem out of style, wasteful, or impractical. But don't underestimate the simplicity of holding a physical book in your hands, flipping through the pages, and not having anything else to shift your focus to. Commit to the classic paper book and you'll get the full, healthier experience. -Lecia Bushak*

So, what exactly is the problem with eBooks? Sure, it can be argued that they are lighter, easier to carry around, technologically advanced, etc. But do these “improvements” actually mean that the eBook is superior to the traditional print? I argue not so much. There are many factors that play into my opinion, including personal biases, scientific research on physical and mental effects, and environmental impacts. Printed books are a form of art. The way the author decides to lay out the page, the font shape and size, the front and back covers, and even the smell of a book all add to the art of a story. This, this is an integral part of what an eBook lacks. Reading stories in general certainly boasts its range of health effects, such as improved mood and thinking; it even sometimes can change lives. While at the end of the day the choice of which medium to read a story from is a personal decision, I hope to sway people in the direction of the ultimately superior printed version.

First, I feel that it is important to address my personal feelings and biases towards printed books over the electronic version. While brainstorming exactly why I feel this way, it was hard to find the correct words. However, anyone that I have spoken with that follows my notion of print superiority agrees that there is something noticeably better or more special about reading

from a physical book. My first thought about why eBooks are not as great as printed books has to do with just that – a noticeable special connection. Personally, I feel that reading off of a screen instead of holding something physical causes a loss of connection to the story; it is not as personal or as intimate. My second point connects with the first; I find that it is harder to immerse myself in a story that is on a screen. Something about it doesn't seem as real and it makes it harder to truly get into what the story is about. Along with that, I find that I lose my place much easier when reading a text off a screen than on a piece of paper – for whatever reason it takes me longer because I cannot as easily follow where I am. Another personal belief is that reading off of an eReader takes away from the special and classic act of reading a book. In this age of technology, everything we do and everywhere we go we are using screens, at work, on our phones, etc. By putting books into a screen format as well, the point of reading (to escape from reality) is completely lost. Reading therefore becomes just like every other thing we do during the day. Then what exactly is the point? A final personal opinion on the superiority of the printed book has to do with its lasting effect, something that will be further discussed later in the thesis. Printed books have a staying power, whereas electronic books are on a screen that can just be turned off – and then they disappear. You cannot make a printed book disappear in that sense; they stay in that form, always able for us to see, always lasting.

While some may say “okay, but these are just your personal feelings”, there is proven scientific research to back a lot of it up. *Medical Daily* frequently has articles that speak to the physical and mental benefits of reading a printed book versus an eBook. One of the biggest problems with the eBook has to do with the two different ways that people read: non-linear and linear. Non-linear reading, also known as superficial reading, is associated with screens such as smartphones and computers – “it's more of a skim than an actual read, with readers darting their

eyes page to page and unable to sit with what's been written for a long period of time” (Castillo). On the other hand, linear reading is when people take the time to look deeper and be more thoughtful and meditative towards the subject. As this article points out, the digital age has made people more prone to non-linear reading. However, if one attempts to read in a linear fashion on a screen, a study from the University of Texas has shown a performance deficit of between 20% and 30% in reading speed (Spera). Maryanne Wolf, cognitive neuroscientist and director of the Center for Reading and Language Research at Tufts University said, "Because we literally and physiologically can read in multiple ways, how we read — and what we absorb from our reading — will be influenced by both the content of our reading and the medium we use” (Castillo). Therefore, reading from a screen in turn leads to not deeply absorbing the information that is being presented and not taking the time to reflect back and form our own personal insights. This also connects to the idea of recalling information. A 2014 study found that readers who used an electronic version were less competent in recalling the plot and events of the book than readers who used a printed version. This may have to do with the tactile sense of progress that a physical book gives – “When you read on paper you can sense with your fingers a pile of pages on the left growing, and shrinking on the right. You have the tactile sense of progress, in addition to the visual. ... Perhaps this somehow aids the reader, providing more fixity and solidity to the reader’s sense of unfolding and progress of the text, and hence the story” (Bushak). Printed books provide reference points that an electronic version cannot.

Another problematic issue with eBooks is the emission of light causing sleep disturbances. People usually take the time to read a book right before they go to bed. However, by using a screen that emits light, melatonin levels (the sleep hormone) drop and going to sleep becomes more of a challenge. Printed books have the opposite effect, usually releasing the stress

of the day and causing people to feel more relaxed and tired. Moreover, screens have been linked to stress AND reading a book has been found to quickly reduce stress in multiple studies. Bushak explains,

Repeated use of mobile phones or laptops late at night has been linked to depression, higher levels of stress, and fatigue among young adults. Constant use of technology not only disrupts our sleeping patterns and throws off our circadian rhythms, but it fosters a shorter attention span and fractured focus — online, we jump from meme to meme and link to link, checking Facebook intermittently. Social media and technological distractions also always seem to foster guilt and regret, and before we know it, three hours have passed and our brains feel like mush. (Bushak)

A final downside to electronic books is the impact on the environment. The stereotypical way to think is that printed books are made of paper and therefore trees must be cut down to make them, deforesting our landscapes, which can cause environmental and health related issues. Yet surprisingly it has been found that the adverse health impacts from making one eReader are estimated to be 70 times greater than those for making a single book. Authors James Charlton and Bill Henderson eloquently describe the eReader saying,

Here's what an e-reader is: a battery-operated slab, about a pound, one-half inch thick, perhaps with an aluminum border, rubberized back, plastic, metal, silicon, a bit of gold, plus rare metals such as

columbite-tantalite (Google it) ripped from the earth, often in war-torn Africa. To make one e-reader requires 33 pounds of minerals, plus 79 gallons of water to refine the minerals and produce the battery and printed writing.

Through the extended use and purchase of eReaders, “we will have lost a chunk of our planet as we lose our minds to the digital juggernaut” (Charlton and Henderson, IX).

So by all means, keeps using your Kindles and other electronic readers, but there is a reason the printed book has stuck around for so long and has been so lasting through centuries of technological changes – because you can’t fix what’s not broken.

## Chapter 2

### The War Between Pixels and Print

*Books traditionally have edges. Some are rough-cut, some are smooth-cut, and a few — at least at my extravagant publishing house — are even top-stained. In the electronic anthill, where are the edges? The book revolution, which from the Renaissance on taught men and women to cherish and cultivate their individuality, threatens to end in a sparkling cloud of snippets. So, bookseller: defend your lonely forts. Keep your edges dry. Your edges are our edges. For some of us, books are intrinsic to our human identity. -John Updike*

The book industry is in a constant state of change. Fear of change in this industry is not new. It began some time ago when industry professionals became concerned about the loss of independent bookstores and small, family-owned publishers due to growth of large companies such as Barnes and Noble, to the current concern about the takeover of the electronic book, also known as the eBook. As readers moved towards using new digital devices, e-book sales skyrocketed, up 1,260 percent between 2008 and 2010, frightening booksellers that saw customers use their stores to find titles they would later purchase online; “print sales dwindled, bookstores struggled to stay open, and publishers and authors feared that cheaper e-books would cannibalize their business” (Alter).

The current day crisis in the industry, and the focus of this thesis, is whether or not the eBook will be big enough to wipe out traditional print. In the technological age, advancements are happening all of the time in all types of companies - it just took the book industry a little

longer to catch up to media such as movies and music. Michael Pietsch, the CEO of Hachette Book Group, spoke about the persistence of the bounded book. He believes that there is one reason that advancements in the movie and music industries were so radical and became the norm so fast. This was the first time these products could become portable; print books have been portable since the day they were invented (Pietsch). Yet people are always looking for innovation and always want the next more exciting, technologically advanced item, and print books just were not updated enough, hence the invention of the eBook. When Amazon came out with the Kindle in 2007, the eBook revolution truly began, accessibility and ease being its main draws to consumers. In 2010, PricewaterhouseCoopers released an intensive study done on the technological changes in the book industry, specifically the eBook. At this time, eBooks were at their coming of age; people were beginning to purchase them; however, they were not extremely prominent yet. The experts behind this study believe that similar to the way consumers had become accustomed to buying electronic versions of movies and music, consumers' reading habits would evolve as well. In 2010, Amazon reported for the first time that their eBook sales outnumbered their sales in print. This study also found that the United States was the leader in the eBook market. At the launch of the Kindle, Amazon offered 90,000 eBooks for purchase, including 102 of the 112 *The New York Times* bestsellers. According to Amazon's own information, the company now has more than 725,000 eBooks in its proprietary AZW format (*Turning the Page: The Future of eBooks*). On top of the increase in use of eBooks, it is important to look at the way books are now being purchased, as well. By the end of 2012, nearly half of U.S. book sales (both print and eBook) were happening online (Friedman).

This proves just as major of a change for the industry as the eBook use does, impacting publishers, bookstores, and authors.

However, viewpoints on the prominence of the eBook revolution differ. Some experts are now declaring the end of the technological changes, specifically the eBook rise. Numbers from Nielson, a U.S. global information and measurement company, have found that the split between print and electronic is currently at a plateau of about 76%/24% (Wikert) where it won't get much higher. Other experts also see the trend of decreasing sales pointing towards the end of the fad. Some 12 million e-readers were sold in 2012, a steep drop from the nearly 20 million sold in 2011. Furthermore, the portion of people who read books primarily on e-readers fell to 32 percent in the first quarter of 2015, from 50 percent in 2012 (Alter) illustrating the regrowth of the print industry and the decline of the electronic, echoing the thoughts of many professionals. A fair number of experts believe that what was once seen as an imminent end to the world of print is now nothing more than a fad that will continue to decrease, something that I as a book nerd hope to be true.

However, other experts vehemently disagree with this proclamation. Jason Illian's article "The (Real) Future of Publishing" thoroughly rejects the idea that the electronic phase is over. Studies done by research house Gartner have equated the slowed perceived growth happening in the industry as part of the normal hype cycle of any media, called the "trough of disillusionment." Illian states,

When a new technology gets talked up and fails to fundamentally change everything in a short amount of time, the conversation turns negative. But that doesn't mean change is over. It is the



pause in the action, the short breath of time where most traditional firms tout their belief that disruption is over, only to soon find out that real change has just begun. What we are experiencing rather is just the break between the waves. And the next wave could forever change publishing. (Illian)

Experts such as Illian believe that we are just seeing the tip of the iceberg, and anyone who writes these changes off as the ending of a fad will be hurt in the long run. As with any business or industry, it takes time to see the full impact of drastic changes such as these.

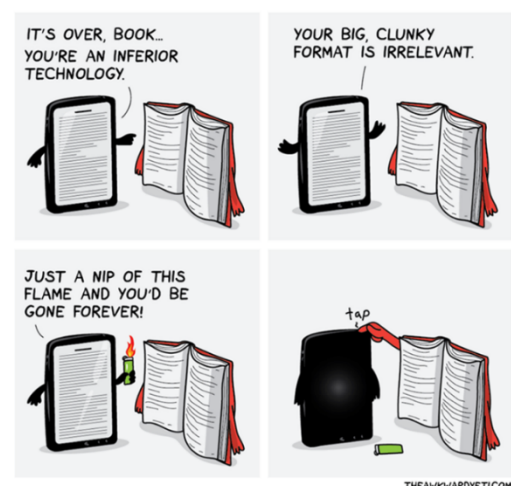
There are also alternative viewpoints about the changes of the industry that many people do not consider. Another perspective to the changing industry is the idea that eBooks may not be the true future, that maybe audiobooks are. Many consumers enjoy the experience of listening to a story over reading it. Audiobooks racked up \$1.5 billion in sales last year and remain the fastest-growing segment of the book publishing industry (Olshan). Yet while this may not be considered necessarily electronic as there is no screen with pixels, these are still changes that involve technology over print.

Another interesting idea that has been brought up is the point that literature is a market, and a failing one at that. In order to keep up marketability, it may be time to introduce advertisement into the book industry. It is so common in music and movies, so why not incorporate it into books in order to raise profitability? Though it may seem like a radical idea, “the book as merchandise might not have an expiration date if we learn to see its marketability in a flexible fashion” (Stavans). This however, is still moving books towards a realm that they do not belong in. By inserting advertisements into books, the focus is being taken away from the

simplicity of the story itself. Instead of a book just being a story for that sole purpose, it instead becomes an advertising platform for an outside world that aims to distract us from our escape.

While there is still a debate over how influential eBooks really will be, most experts now agree on the fact that at least for the near future, print and electronic books will coexist simultaneously. The study done by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that consumers do not want either/or - they want both. In certain cases, printed editions will be replaced by digital editions, but in other cases both media will complement each other. Only one representative from the book industry believed that demand for printed books will dry up in the long run. In coming years, printed books will still account for the majority of sales. Technology may change rapidly, but people's habits do not. "People will continue to want books to fill their shelves, give as gifts, and place on their bedside. But make no mistake – modern reading devices such as the Kindle and iPad mark the beginning of a digital transformation, and the book market has taken its first, irreversible steps into new territory" (*Turning the Page: The Future of eBooks*). These changes happening in not just the book industry, but many other industries as well over the past decade or so, are a symptom of a disease that plagues the millennial generation - a detachment lifestyle.

Printed books embody a certain sense of permanence, of a tactile realness - something that our world should be striving to preserve. Yet as the next section will show, the generation that will soon control the world seems to be afraid of this very notion. The war between pixels and print is on, and only the millennials and future influential generations will be able to declare the victor.



## **Part Two**

### Millennials

### Chapter 3

#### Keeping Up With The Joneses, Or Not

*Wealth is the ability to fully experience life.* -Henry David Thoreau

The millennial generation, those born between the early 1980s and 2000, have been a subject of controversy and examination for some years now. People are so interested in this new group of youngsters that seem to be reinventing the “norm” by living life completely differently from their parents and grandparents – the rebellious generation. This may have to do with the times that millennials have grown up in. Especially in relation to the later millennials, being raised during years of global economic turmoil and high unemployment rates, along with marriage and parenthood occurring later in life, many millennials “carry the burden of relatively fewer long-term career prospects (compared to those in previous generations), while still enjoying the benefits of relatively less responsibilities” (Jarecke-Cheng). Along with this financial instability, technology and an increased sense of social responsibility and global awareness are also some of the greatest propellers in millennials’ drastic change in lifestyle (Jarecke-Cheng). One of the biggest changes in lifestyle has to do with what is called the “ownership culture” - the way that items are purchased and possessed by society. The way that millennials have taken a part in ownership culture has shifted so drastically compared to previous generations that not only has it changed the business world in the way that companies must promote and sell their services and items, but it has also become a defining element of this generation.

To understand this change in lifestyle, it is important to start off with some key figures about millennials from Goldman Sachs. The mean student loan debt in 2013 was \$20,926. Adults married and living in their own household in 2012 was 23%, which dropped by more than 50% since the 1960s. Furthermore, the median marriage age moved up five years to 30. Millennials are not settling down and forming roots as fast as previous generations. Numbers are also down for homeownership in this generation. However, it's not just homes; millennials are also straying away from purchasing other big-ticket items such as cars or luxury goods. They are instead favoring a new set of services that provide access to products without personal ownership, forming what's being called a "sharing economy" (*Millennials Infographic*).

A "sharing economy" directly relates to the change in the ownership culture in the millennial generation. Many millennials are no longer purchasing homes or cars in favor of using companies such as Uber and Airbnb, which allow the same capabilities without the personal possession, a "sharing economy". This could be due to the fact that the millennial generation is experiencing an evolution in consciousness in regards to ownership, something that is also slowly spreading to every age group; the way people view ownership is now shifting, from music listening, to car buying, etc. There is an accessibility and ease to the way that items can be purchased and attained today that was not available 15 or 20 years ago. What is ironic, however, about the sharing economy is the fact that it seems millennials are more connected, however, it is an impersonal connection. They do not own these items and they are not sharing their personal goods, they are just using it for a moment and then getting rid of it for another person to use, round and round. Through the use of the Internet, the world is at our fingertips; we can buy and own anything our hearts desire in the snap of a finger. According to Josh Allan Dykstra, business

writer and advisor, the value of an item has now shifted with this change in supply and demand; “the biggest insight we can glean from the death of ownership is about connection. This is the thing which is now scarce, because when we can easily acquire anything, the question becomes, ‘What do we do with this?’ The value now lies in the doing” (Dykstra). This is where the change in millennials’ reasons for owning items comes from. Millennials do not purchase items just to have them anymore, unlike previous generations that enjoyed owning material goods for the sole purpose of acquiring something of substance. Dykstra states, “Today, a product or service is powerful because of how it connects people to something—or someone—else. It has impact because we can do something worthwhile with it, tell others about it, or have it say something about us” (Dykstra). There are now outside motivators for owning something rather than just the physical concept of having it, an idea that the millennial generation seems to be fond of. Millennials are also now living in smaller, urban apartments instead of large suburban houses, resulting in an inability to own many material items (Lutz). Therefore, in conjunction with this redefinition of ownership, there is a desire for flexibility. Being shackled by too much stuff limits millennials’ ability to lead nomadic lives, and millennials more than any previous generation have expressed a need for personal mobility (Jarecke-Cheng).

This fondness for lack of possession also has to do with the fact that millennials value experiences over items. This, too, has become a defining element of the generation. With a wanderlust and a curiosity like no other, millennials aim to fill their lives with memorable times, people, and experiences. Unlike older generations that based their wealth on material goods, millennials see personal wealth as experienced based, a notion backed by almost all experts. Kipp Jarecke-Cheng, Chief Communications Officer at Publicis Healthcare Communications,

writes that for millennials, “keeping up with the Joneses (or the Forbeses, for that matter) has much less to do with a lifelong pursuit of accumulating material goods and more to do with the collection of meaningful experiences and shareable ideas over frivolous consumables” (Jarecke-Cheng). Millennials care more about filling their lives with memories – memories of travel, of friends, of happy times - which they associate with finding meaning and value during their lifetime, than about material objects that do not serve a greater purpose than just being. Grasping and taking part in global perspectives tops many millennials’ bucket lists. Therefore, “saving up to backpack across South America or to loiter at a café in Europe holds much more allure than pinching pennies to buy a house or a car. For Millennials, the luxury of keeping their belongings on a USB thumb drive or in the cloud affords them the ability to fend off feelings of #yolo and #fomo by literally getting out of town at a moment’s notice” (Jarecke-Cheng).

This element of the change in ownership culture, which has led to millennials valuing experiences over items, in part defines this generation. Many Gen Xers, along with other older generations, see millennials and the way that they live as frivolous, crazy, and detached. Surely millennials are onto something with the idea that a life full of experiences may be more meaningful, but maybe there is a happy medium that previous generations, as well as the millennial generation, are failing to see. However, is it really so crazy to put life’s value on experiences? After all, experience is how we learn. And the age old saying does surely go “money can’t buy happiness”. The problem with the millennial lifestyle therefore lies within the driving forces behind this change. This strong driving force is the millennial trend of detachment and lack of personal connection, a dangerous problem that threatens to destroy our human authenticity if it continues to follow the path that millennials have set it on.

## Chapter 4

### The Overconnected Disconnect

*The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers & cities; but to know someone who thinks & feels with us, & who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

This trend of millennial detachment comes in forms of both social and emotional, as well as the previously discussed detachment from material items. Many argue about the reasons for this sudden lack of attachment; however, there seems to be one specific reason that encompasses all others; the reason behind millennials' lack of social and emotional attachment and ownership of physical items may have to do with trust issues. An article by D.C. McAllister called "What's Behind Millennials' Trust Issues" discusses the possible reasons for this generation's lack of trust. A recent study cited in the article shows that the millennial generation's trust in people, as well as in major institutions, was less than any other generation before them. Yet this is an interesting finding considering the rise in a "sharing economy" where we seem to overly trust other people with personal aspects of our lives such as renting out our homes and the information that we put out on social media.

The reasons for this lack of trust could range from growing up in an unstable economy, to inequality, to violence, yet this doesn't get to the real underlying problem which comes down to millennials' *relational detachment*. Trust is something that is gained through personally knowing someone and sharing a connection on a local level. The millennial generation has been raised



with a “cosmopolitan, multicultural, global paradigm superimposed on their personal social sensibilities, and it has left them grasping for intimacy, friendship, and affection” (McAllister). Through being overly connected to the outside world on a surface level, millennials have formed a disconnection with themselves and those personally surrounding them on a deeper level. Millennials may feel that they are well educated and well versed on a variety of subjects, yet “knowing *about* the world is not the same thing as knowing the world, which can’t really be done—you can really only know individual people” (McAllister). Our minds may be able to know a lot of information, but “our heart can only be intimate, can only trust, that which it connects with, and knows—and that can only happen in the small, local spheres in which we live” (McAllister). In order for millennials to regain trust in each other, they must open themselves up to connection and attachment to one another, something that this generation runs vigorously away from.

Emphasis in this generation is also put on individualism. Millennials strive for personal success, in whatever form it may hold, and search for a personal identity. With all of this emphasis on the individual, there results a lack of focus on the community. Millennials almost follow a ‘dog eat dog’ and ‘everyone is out for themselves’ world mentality. This in itself can lead to a detachment from others. A community mindset cannot therefore be formed. Another defining part of the millennial generation that illustrates this lack of attachment is the infamous hook-up culture in the dating scene. While this thesis does not delve specifically into this unfortunate phenomenon, it is surely something that cannot be overlooked. Ask any millennial how they feel about the way that their generation dates and interacts, and you will overwhelmingly get a resounding sense of unhappiness and irritation concerning the fact that it

seems nobody wants to ‘commit’, nobody wants to ‘settle down’, and nobody want to be ‘tied down’, hence the formation of the hook-up culture.

This social and emotional detachment may be giving rise to an even more serious problem facing future generations. Often we cannot see the immensity of a problem that is currently happening until its effects come out later. Though this idea of detachment in the millennial generation may seem a tad trivial and the consequences mostly intangible, there may be scientific evidence that this detachment so common in the millennial generation is having an irreversible effect on ourselves and the generations that follow. Barbara Fredrickson, a psychology professor at UNC and a distinguished researcher in emotions and positive psychology, speaks to this in her article “Your Phone Versus Your Heart”. Her article digs into a breakthrough explanation of the serious long-term biological impact that disconnection may really be having. Neuroplasticity is the concept that experiences leave an imprint on us; habits are engrained and mold the structure of your brain, similar to muscle memory. When connections with others are formed, your vagal tone increases. Your vagus nerve is connected to your brain through your heart. She explains, “Subtle variations in your heart rate reveal the strength of this brain-heart connection, and as such, heart-rate variability provides an index of your vagal tone” (Fredrickson); a higher vagal tone, the better able your body is to regulate itself and stay healthy. Furthermore, vagal tone is connected to facial expressions and ability to tune into the human voice; a higher vagal tone also results in an increase for capacity, friendship, and connection. Therefore, connection with others actually increases your health. Biologically this follows the same law as ‘use it or lose it’. Without regular connection to others, you will slowly lose the capacity to do so. The field of genomics has found that traits for loneliness or isolation change how genes in our immune systems are

expressed. The human condition is much more amenable than previously thought. It is up to us how we will choose to mold ourselves and the future generations (Fredrickson).

The question comes down to what this theme of detachment and lack of connection says about the millennial generation as a whole. Filling life with experiences and meaning in order to find happiness is the focus of this generation. Yet are millennials taking part in a fruitless pursuit of happiness? Can a world so devoid of attachment constitute a life filled with true happiness? These questions may be hard to answer in this current day and age since the millennials are still in the process of growing up and finding their way in the world. This may not be able to be answered until millennials themselves are towards the end of their lives with the ability to look back and see if the way that they lived and the detachment that they took part in negatively or positively affected their lives. We can only hope, however, that for millennials' sake a switch flips at some point in the not too distant future before it begins to impact too many future generations that causes them to realize that detachment isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Humans as social creatures need social and emotional connections to survive and thrive. I personally do not have the prescription for this disease that plagues the current generation, yet we as a world that can't afford to lose human connection can only hope that just like every epidemic does, no matter how severe, this will eventually fade away.

## **Part Three**

### Authenticity

## Chapter 5

### Hall of Mirrors

*The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth--it is the truth which conceals that there is none. -Ecclesiastes*

To open this chapter, it is important to explain the irony behind the epigraph. This quote happens to be the epigraph that French thinker Jean Baudrillard uses to open his book *The Precession of Simulacra*. However, this quote does not actually exist; nowhere in Ecclesiastes is this said – Baudrillard himself made all of it up. The second irony of my decision to use a quote that Baudrillard had already used is that my epigraph is now an imitation of his epigraph, a simulacrum of his previous work, which happens to be a simulacrum as well. These ironies, which I personally find pretty funny while I’m writing this, but do not expect many to understand yet, will be apparent when his ideas are discussed later in the chapter.

The ideas of printed books vs. eBooks and millennial detachment from physical items moving towards the experience can be connected by the question of the tangible vs. the image. This concept is one that has been explored by philosophers and theorists since the beginning of these disciplines. Which is better? Which is the real, the authentic? Is what we can physically experience the most authentic, or are reality and authenticity things that elude our physical world? Two key philosophers that deal with this question are Plato and Baudrillard. Bear with me as I dive a little deeper into the theory part of this thesis which will in turn help me to explain my own personal thoughts and philosophy on this topic better.

Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* is a fairly well known piece of philosophical literature. In summary, it aims to explain the nature of reality; however, this reality is formed by a set of false images. The prisoners in the cave are exposed to the shadows of objects on the wall in front of them. The prisoners are confusing the shadows of the objects for the true objects themselves. However, to the prisoners, this is their reality, for it is all they have ever known. Yet when one escapes to see the outside world, the true place that the prisoners' 'reality' is coming from, this changes their whole perception on what is real and what is authentic. The one who has escaped now sees the real world of 'forms' in Plato's term. Plato believed that there was an ultimate reality somewhere out there, yet our world is filled with copies of the true 'forms' that exist in the elusive ultimate reality. Our main goal in life, according to Plato, is to strive to reach this ultimate reality and to understand it. However, this ultimate reality is not something that is tangible or easily grasped or understood. It is not something that can be seen or held onto. While we are deceived by images and shadows of this true reality, the main point when it comes to Plato's theory is that it DOES exist somewhere.

This "somewhere" is truly an abstract place. However, Plato does his best to describe it to his followers as the ultimate reality, which is also known as the highest good, is the place that contains the perfect, unchanging forms. It is the goal of human life to try to understand this highest good. Plato's reality cannot be found easily, for "the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned; in the same way the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good" (Plato, 322). An example that Plato gives to show how the highest goodness could be attained on earth is in an explanation of government; however, I believe it also applies very strongly to my

argument. Plato believes that in order to achieve a well governed state, the rulers must find “some way of life they like better than government; for only then will you have government by the truly rich, those, that is, whose riches consist not of gold, but of the true happiness of a good and rational life” (Plato, 325). The key idea in that quote has to do with the truly rich in life being those that have satisfaction within their goodness; people reach Plato’s higher reality through life satisfaction and happiness, one of the main aspects of this thesis. Plato seems almost to be illustrating the millennial lifestyle – ultimate goodness can be reached through a life not filled with material items but the happiness of a good life.

Now Jean Baudrillard, on the other hand, takes this idea one step further than Plato in saying that there may be no such thing as an ultimate reality AT ALL. A key term in understanding Baudrillard’s philosophy is ‘simulacra(um)’. The concept of simulacra is defined as an image or representation of something. For example, a map would be considered a simulacrum of the world. Baudrillard argues that everything we see is just another form of simulacra of something else; everything is an image of an image of an image. In his work The Precession of Simulacra, Baudrillard gives two examples of this lack of true reality. The first is about the images of God we see in our world. Certainly, as images, these symbols we use to depict God cannot be a direct representation of divinity, for they are not God Himself. Baudrillard questions, “But what becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra? Does it remain the supreme authority, simply incarnated in images as a visible theology? Or is it volatilized into simulacra which alone deploy their pomp and power of fascination – the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God?” (Baudrillard in Leitch, 1559). These images, Baudrillard believes, have the power to take over the true idea of God in the minds of men, to replace the reality all together. However,

maybe we have created these images to give ourselves a sort of reality to grasp onto, for maybe these images suggest “that ultimately there has never been any God, that only the simulacrum exists, indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum” (Baudrillard in Leitch, 1559). Is God not a reality but only an image created by us? Kind of a depressing thought. (We could lean on John of Damascus in his *Three Treatises on the Divine Image* when he says, “Of old, God the incorporeal and formless was never depicted, but now that God has been seen in the flesh and has associated with human kind, I depict what I have seen of God. I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation.”) Baudrillard furthers this argument by tearing apart the beloved place of Disneyland (I think he is aiming to ruin people’s childhoods). Disneyland, to Baudrillard, is a made-up model of the world that exists outside of it, including the values people hold, the American way of life, etc. People are drawn to this model of a utopian, illustrated world. However, Disney, just like the images of God, only exists as a sort of simulation to a world that is also a simulation of itself. Baudrillard states:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation or reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus saving the reality principle. The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real (Baudrillard in Leitch, 1565).



These examples illustrate Baudrillard's theory that everything is just a simulacrum of something else. Even the world we see outside around us is just an image of an image of an image. So, where does it end? According to Baudrillard, we are stuck in a hall of mirrors, a never-ending search for reality and authenticity in a world full of simulacra of simulacra. What then is Baudrillard's idea of the ultimate reality or truth? Through these examples he seems to say that we as humans fabricate these simulacra because deep down we know nothing is real. While personally I believe that is untrue and a tad more than slightly pessimistic, I concede to Baudrillard on the fact that humans (whether they create it themselves or not) need something to grasp onto, to hold, to believe in. For if there was no such thing as reality as Baudrillard suggests, and people didn't form something to believe in, we wouldn't be able to cope. Stability is necessary to the continuation of a sane human life.

Plato and Baudrillard both lack a solid form of reality, in my opinion. If you were to put me, Plato, and Baudrillard on a continuum of belief in an authentic reality, it would go in that order. For Plato, ultimate reality is 'somewhere out there', yet he can't tell us where, we can't easily find or access it, and it can't be proven (seems kind of flakey to me). And to Baudrillard, truth in reality and authenticity doesn't actually exist because all we experience are simulacra of simulacra. So, where therefore does it end? Where does the infinite hall of mirrors stop reflecting back and actually show something different? What, therefore, is truly authentic? My belief is that reality and authenticity must stop somewhere. In order for people to have hope and to live a meaningful life, they have to be given something real and knowable to grasp onto, or else chaos would ensue. My philosophy of authenticity will be explored more through the lens of books and stories in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6

### Sticking to Our Roots

*Maybe you are searching among the branches, for what only appears in the roots. -Rumi*

Authenticity – what does that mean? To many people it could mean many things, but to me, it is important to narrow down the definition to enhance my argument. Three words fully encompass my idea of authenticity: natural, permanent, and lasting. By these three words I define authentic as something that has been around for so long that it has become engrained in human nature, it is a part of who we are as humans, and its shelf life still has an extensive amount of time until expiration. I will look at authenticity through the lens of books and stories to prove that just like in movies, the original (printed books) is better than the sequel (eBook) will ever be.

To take a quick trip back through human history we find that the notion of communication has existed since our modern-day species began to develop. However, the concept of the printed book that we know so well today as the main format of story-telling did not become widely popular until Gutenberg created the printing press around the year 1440. Before this time, books were reserved for the rich and powerful because the painstaking process of block print or handwriting every word made wide consumption almost impossible. To go even farther back in time, information and stories would have to be shared by word of mouth. Anecdotes, lessons, and traditions were passed down through generations by the elders, and this was the primal way that stories were shared. Oral tradition is what many people think of as the first form of communication between people, and therefore, this would mean that written books

would not be authentic within my definition. When thinking about this, I got stuck within this same trap. It seemed that I was contradicting my own argument about written books being the most authentic form. However, I soon remembered that the human species goes back past oral tradition. As our human species began to evolve, one of the first forms that most closely began to represent our modern-day human was the so called ‘caveman’. Cavemen did not have an eloquent and complex form of language to be able to orally share stories like we do now. What they did do, however, and what we can still find evidence of up to this day, is draw and write on their cave walls. Their form of story-telling was through hand drawn illustrations, in fact inscribed in a way that has led to their permanence in the world:

It wasn’t until three million years after man’s debut, around the year 30,000 B.C.E, that communication began to take on an intentional, manufactured format. The most well-known form of primitive communication is cave paintings. The artistic endeavors were created by a species of man that appeared around 130,000 B.C.E, the homo sapiens. The method involved creating pigments made from the juice of fruits and berries, colored minerals, or animal blood. These pigments were then used to create depictions of primitive life on the cave walls. The purpose of the paintings has been questioned by scholars for years, but the most popular theory states that the depictions were used as a manual for instructing others what animals were safe to eat. (“History of Communication from Cave Drawings to the Web”)

These *physical* engravings have survived thousands and thousands of years, an ode to the strength of the authentic form of written stories. Written communication has been a cornerstone of our human nature, from very early on in the species – and it has stuck around for so long that it has engrained itself into who we are as people. The “hall of mirrors” that Baudrillard argued for I argue ends with the kind of writing described in this thesis. Permanent, printed forms serve as the endpoint, for it is what humans have known for eons. There is a stability and concreteness to this writing that stabilized the “mirror effect”. It is a wall that nothing surpasses; it is natural to who we are, and human nature cannot be perfectly or truly duplicated.

Books are like tools that have evolved over time as we as people have also evolved. However, the form of the printed book, while still an evolution from cave wall drawings, has been the main form of story-telling and information sharing since the 15<sup>th</sup> century and it still holds the main properties that cave drawings held, written and engrained into an object, permanent. That was, until about 10 years ago when the eBook made its debut. All of a sudden, a new form of story-telling tried to make its way into an industry that has subsisted just the way it was for 600 years. Yet this evolution decidedly took away from the humanness of the printed book. There is nothing wrong with the evolution of technology; I have nothing against the way certain technologies have helped expand human global connection or increased medical knowledge. However, the best technologies are the ones that benefit humans and then get out of the way for us to continue our lives, albeit in improved ways due to its help. The eBook does nothing of the sort. Instead it tries to upgrade something that doesn't need an upgrade – it tries to fix something that is not broken. Relatedly, the eBook in a sense is breaking us, both mentally and physically as mentioned in Chapter 1. When it interferes with human nature and authenticity, this is when technology becomes a problem. The way our world works nowadays is through

“Mary Poppins technology” where you can put as many things as you want into a piece of technology and it stays the same size and weight – it doesn’t grow or shrink no matter what is stored in it (Case). This relates to cellphones, laptops, and of course eReaders. The great thing about cellphones and laptops is the ease of information access, the ability to connect to people from anywhere in the world, and if used in moderation, is a good form of technological evolution. However, what benefits, other than the Mary Poppins effect, do eReaders boast? In what ways do they enhance the human condition and make it better than it was before? There is a reason that printed books have stuck around for so long even though the rest of the world has been changing drastically with the increase of technology because they are authentic to us as humans, they are permanent and lasting and unlike the laptop or cellphone, have not needed an upgrade.

In concession to Baudrillard, I will say that it is arguable that simulacra do exist in the world, as can be seen through the eReader itself, for I believe that the eReader is in fact a fake duplication of a printed book. However, Baudrillard takes this argument a step too far in my opinion because I do not believe that every single thing in this world is a simulacrum. I guess you could say that I am more hopeful in this sense that authenticity still exists in some places, whereas Baudrillard does not. So yes, the printed book is a simulacrum of sorts, for it is not the original, but it is much closer to the original idea of written communication and stories than the eReader is. While printed books are a small (almost trivial) step away from the authentic, eBooks are a hop, skip, and jump away. Why would we want to partake in something that drags us away from our authentic nature? Plato would be thoroughly disappointed in our distraction from the quest of ultimate good (though he didn’t much like the idea of books either). Through the simulacra of the digital world, we can see that our natural world, the world of the physical and of

the lasting is better and more real. We should not want to move away from a form that gives us the ability to grasp it, to feel it, to form a connection to it, and know that it will not magically disappear. There is comfort in the idea of permanence. Humans desire connection, whether it be human connection or a connection formed through a story. Yet a connection cannot be formed when the story can automatically disappear from their hands as an eBook does. People do not like change, myself included. The printed book is a physical symbol of this permanent authenticity that we as a people crave to find. We lose our sense of self in a lack of permanence; when nothing is stable, neither are we. As curious being, we are interested in finding their roots, in sticking to who they are, and when technology inhibits this return to an authentic life, this is when it becomes a problem.

So, where do millennials fit into this argument about returning to the authentic? The changes in the book industry are a symptom of the changes in millennial lifestyle. Millennials are moving farther and farther away from a classic sort of life, a life that many generations before us had lived. With their lack of detachment, millennials are losing connections, the main draw to having a physical book instead of an electronic version. In order for millennials to find fulfillment, they must take a look back at how previous generations and past times lived their lives in better conjunction with the real and physical world and the people that are in it. Just as the eBook is moving away from the reality of the physical book, the millennial generation too is moving away from a real, authentic lifestyle, a problem that only seems to be worsening. The more we move away, the more lost we get. “Maybe you are searching among the branches, for what only appears in the roots.”

## Conclusion

*In reality, the end of civilization has been clinically established for a century, and countersigned by events. Expatiating on the matter is now nothing but a means of distraction. But it's a distraction from the catastrophe there in front of us, and that has been there for a long time, from the catastrophe that we are, the catastrophe that the West is. That catastrophe is existential, affective, and metaphysical first of all. It resides in Western man's incredible estrangement from the world, an estrangement that demands, for example, that he become the master and possessor of nature—one only seeks to possess what one fears. It's not for nothing that he has placed so many screens between himself and the world. By cutting himself off from what exists, Western man has made it into this desolate expanse, this dreary, hostile, mechanical, absurd nothingness which he must ceaselessly devastate, through his labor, his cancerous activism, his shallow hysterical agitation. Relentlessly driven from euphoria to stupor and from stupor to euphoria, he tries to remedy his absence from the world through a whole accumulation of expertise, prostheses, and relations, a whole technological hardware store that is ultimately disappointing. He's more and more visibly that over equipped existentialist who can't stop engineering everything, recreating everything, unable as he is to bear a reality that is completely beyond him.*

– The Invisible Committee in To Our Friends

The question remains, who has it right? As a millennial, myself, there are many aspects of this generation that I identify with. One of the main aspects, the idea that experiences are more valuable than items, is something that I too believe. I aim to fill my life with times that I will remember, and I would much rather spend my money on an experience than a bunch of objects sitting around my house. Yet where I diverge from this generation is when connection and attachment starts being lost, and this is where the problem with eBooks comes into play. Props go to the millennial generation, however, for not totally forgetting about the power of reading. In fact, “millennials have demonstrated the tendency to read more—and buy more books—than other generations...millennials buy 30% of books, compared to the 24% purchased by Baby Boomers. They even go to the library, with an estimated 61% of Millennials still carrying a library card” (Millennials Are a Generation of Readers). Millennials are also partly credited with keeping the publishing industry alive through the consumption of YA (Young Adult) novels. Go millennials!

These changes in the book industry are just a symptom of this detachment in the millennial generation, a problem that I believe could possibly be cured by a return to an authentic type of life. However, there is also a necessary balance. It is true that advancements have been made due to modern day workings, and I do not believe that this should be discarded or reversed, but when we get too deep into that world, we lose focus on our roots – on certain things that are authentic to our nature and keep us grounded as humans. Sure, it is important to spend money on intangible things, but some tangible items, such as books, are also necessary to keep us grounded and to remind us of the physical world that we live in amongst the trappings of the cyber, immaterial world that threaten to encompass us at times. I urge those who may have fallen into this trap to pick up a good ole printed book and allow yourself to be taken away to the places that



await, and see just how connected you feel to yourself and the world around you after the last page has been turned. Then I urge you to even try to regain the same feeling after reading the story as a screened eBook on the slab of metal called an eReader. Moving forward is not always progression.

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## Suggested Material

As you can probably gather from reading my thesis, this work covers a wide variety of information and topics, the scope being too large to fully investigate and dive deeply into for this specific assignment. That being said, there are pieces of literature, as well as movies, that I believe complement the range of aspects of this project, and may help give a different or more in depth viewpoint if you are so inclined to think further about the questions raised. Listed in alphabetical order below are some of my suggestions, enjoy:

- ❖ *Arrival* (starring Amy Adams, 2016)
- ❖ *Crosstalk* by Connie Willis
- ❖ *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury
- ❖ *Fight Club* (starring Brad Pitt & Edward Norton, 1999)
- ❖ *The Book of Speculation* by Erika Swyler
- ❖ *The Library at Mount Char* by Scott Hawkins
- ❖ *The Matrix* (starring Keanu Reeves & Laurence Fishburne, 1999)
- ❖ *The Precession of Simulacra* by Jean Baudrillard
- ❖ *The Republic* by Plato
- ❖ *Uglies* series by Scott Westerfeld

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